Exploring and Proclaiming the Depths of Scripture
FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

Our Fight with Sin-Part 4
Recognizing and Responding to God's Correction
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well if you've ever broken a bone—I just thought I'd start with a positive question this morning. You done that? It's awful, isn't it? Just the sound, the feel, it's just terrible. I've done that a few times. Four or five times, I think. Broken my bones on the playground on the playground as a kid. Broken my bones on the ball field as a teenager. And even broken my bones in my fights with my brother. Uhm.

You know, and it's one thing to break your bones by accident. It's another thing to have your bones broken on purpose. I'm not talking about my brother, I don't think. Um, maybe. Maybe he did do that on purpose now that I think about it. But you know, I'm talking about when people say they're breaking your bones for your own good. You think it doesn't happen, it does. I remember I broke my arm, both the radius and the ulna, just about the wrist—which is an ugly sight, by the way—and the doctor of course cast me up and then gave me those instructions. Now go easy. Don't use your arm, don't use your hand, don't pull, don't push, don't shove, just go easy. It's gotta heal.

And of course, that's for sissies you know. I used my arm, just, this isn't going to slow my down. That is, until I went in for the check-up, so many weeks into it when they x-ray your arm again. So they took the x-rays, and he went, "Hmmm. There needs to be some changes, here." Which to me, I thought, that's going to be, maybe a new cast, new color, I don't know, more cotton stuffed in. I didn't know what changes. I started to get the idea when he took his little buzz saw out and he kind of cut my cast all the way around my wrist in two places. Then he put his big strong hand on one side of the cast, and his other hand on the other side of the cast, and looked up at his x-ray. And then he looked down on my arm, and he looked up at the x-ray. And he said, "Are you ready?"

I'm like, "For what?" You know, "What are you doing?"

And he said, "One, two—"

Snap!

Oh, ho. I'm like, "What are doing to me!"

And then he said, "Now, don't use your arm, okay? No pushing, no pulling, no playing, be careful!"

Uhh. I listened to him, that time. And thankfully didn't have to have my arm reset. That's what he called it. It sounds nice, "reset." Uh! Snapped my bones on purpose.

In Psalm 51, David talks about some broken bones in his life. He's not talking about the calcified frame that holds his body together. He's talking about the component parts of his life that have been shattered. And if you know the Bible, you know Psalm 51. It was a time when he was really grieving over some of the crushing in his life that he had caused. His sin, his foolishness, his rebellion against God's word. But interestingly enough, in the middle of Psalm 51, he says it just forthrightly and plainly. He says you know, "God has broken my bones." And doesn't even use the word "fracture" or "break," he uses the word "crushed." He crushed my bones.

Now, that's counter-intuitive. I mean, that's a bit of a surprise. I mean, here we picture this God who is so kind and so loving and so nice, and here David says that God has done this to me. I mean, that just doesn't fit our caricature of God. We carry about this little cartoon theology of a God who loves us so much he would never let anything bad happen to us. And when it does, sometimes we have enough just a big enough view of God to say, "Well, you know, he allowed some things in my life that were painful." That's not at all the verbiage of Psalm 51. He says he not only allowed it, he intentionally and purposefully caused it. And then he uses an analogy of broken

bones that, if we've experienced it, we know, "Wow." That's acute, and distressing. That's big. That's tough. Would God do that to us?

Well the context of Psalm 51 is the same as Hebrews 12. And the Bible says, "Yes, God would do that." And he does do that. As a matter of fact, if he hasn't done that to you, the Bible says you've got a reason to question that you're even a Christian. Because God is a God who loves holiness in your life more than he's committed to you being comfortable or happy. As a matter of fact, he'd rather see tears in your eyes than seeing sin in your life. He is a God of holiness who wants to replicate that holiness in your life, and he is willing to even inflict you with pain so that you will stop walking down a path of sin and start walking down the path of righteousness.

Hebrews 12. If you haven't turned there, take a look at this very counter-intuitive and surprising passage to a lot of people that have yet to understand this thing I like to call "spiritual spankings." It's a God of discipline. And the picture here, the analogy, is not one of a physician, it's one of a father who loves his child enough to bring pain into his life for a strategic corrective purpose. Verse 5. You've forgotten that word of encouragement. Talk about counter-intuitive. I'm thinking that at this point, encouragement. You're going to give me a word of encouragement addressed to us as sons. I'm expecting something that can be on a Dayspring card. You know? Give something, something, uh, flowery. Give me something comfortable. Well, here's the word of encouragement. Here's the counter-intuitive part. And then, if you don't have a reference Bible, be sure and jot it in the margin. This comes right out of Proverbs 3:11-12. And he quotes this Old Testament proverb, and he says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline. And do not lost heart when he rebukes you." Those are big words. "Because the Lord disciplines those he loves." And I know that's hard for us, because if God loves us, I mean, is he going to make us always feel good; the answer's "no."

As a matter of fact, circle this word. "He punishes." That's a big, big vocabulary word. That's the word, "chastisement," some of the old translations translate. That's the word, just put it in the margin, for corporal punishment. That's why I called it spiritual spankings. This is about God applying, and I know it's an analogy—but to our lives the kind of acute pain that we would picture in a father taking his child and having to corporately punish his child to get him to do the right thing. He punishes everyone he accepts as his son. End quote. Now he says, "Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons for what son is not disciplined by his father. And if you're not disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you're an illegitimate child. Right? You're not a true son. Those are illegitimate children that don't have God's discipline and not true sons. Moreover, verse 9 says, we all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live. Our fathers they disciplined us for a little while. I mean, they had until we were teenagers, as they thought best. They didn't always do it perfectly, but God disciplines us for our good. In the best sense of the word. He not only does it well, he does it with the best of intentions, that we may—here's the intention—share in his holiness. That's what all of chapter 12 is about. Now, no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who are trained by it. That's a mouthful. Basically, one analogy all stemming from Proverbs 3:11-12, and that is, that if God loves you and you are his child, he will discipline you so that you will be corrected in a path of your sin and walk in the path righteousness. We need to kind of get a big picture of that and let the framework and anatomy, the roadmap of this thing called spiritual spankings, get defined in our lives.

So if you've found your worksheet, the first thing I want to do is just kind of get the flow of all of this. Kind of give us the sense of what spiritual spankings are all about. And I know some of this is elementary, but if we put this down in some kind of chart form here, we can kind of get a sense of what it's all about.

And let's start with this. It all starts with our sin. And that's the context, here, right? That's how it started in verse 1 and 2, the sin that so easily entangles. We're supposed to get rid of it. According to verse 4, we're in a struggle with sin, and we're really not trying as hard as we should. We're really not heavyweights in this. We're not martyrs, we're not shedding blood. We're lightweights. But, we need to grow up. We need to fight this with a little more vehemence, and a little disciplines and resolve. It's all about fighting sin. And that's the context. It's all about that. And remember two sides to this. We've tried to emphasize this in the last two weeks. Sin in God's book is not only doing the thing you shouldn't do, right? That's a transgression, a violation. It's also not doing the things that you should do. Both of those are wrong. You know, when we're there fixing dinner, and we say to our kids who are zoning out in front of the television, "Hey, get up and set the table." If they go, "Hm." Right, if that's their response? That's sin. Ooh, that's sin.

We've asked you to do something you're not doing. And he can't rationalize it in his head, "Well, it's not sin because I'm not doing anything I shouldn't do, 'cause I'm just sitting here passively, see?" No. Not doing what you're supposed to do is as much sin as if they're throwing the ball around in the house, and I say, "Stop that!" And they go, "Hm," and they keep throwing the ball. Ooh, that's sin, too. So there's sins of transgression, sins of commission, and sins of omission. And we need to recognize that God will discipline us for both. And we need to be aware of that. But it all starts with our sin, transgressing what God has asked us to do. And then, we need to recognize, it's not like God is just sitting there warming up his paddle just waiting for corporal punishment opportunities. This context is about a loving father. And loving fathers, put this down, the reaction is grief. Fathers are grieving over the fact that their kids aren't obeying. It's not like my kids disobey and I go, "Great! Opportunity to spank. I can't wait for this." That's not how it works. If I love my kids, I want them to do right, and I'm grieved that they don't do the right thing.

And if you know your Bible, you may have already written this down. But Ephesians 4:30. And the context there is about saying the right things, and doing the right things, and not going down the wrong path in our minds or our words. And he says, "Listen. Don't grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Don't grieve him. He hurts over this." And by the way, you might want to jot down Genesis 6:6, another passage where we think of God ready to destroy the world with a flood, and it starts with a statement of God's grief. I know it says well man's inclination of his heart was sinful, and he was sorry that he made mankind, but then it adds this phrase. And it says, "He was grieved in his heart." We're not dealing with a software program here. We're dealing with a person. A heavenly father who looks from heaven and sees us sin and his heart is broken over that. And that's his first reaction, a father to a child going, "Man, I wish they wouldn't do that."

Now, if I tell my kid to set the table. "Get up and set the table. Come on, let's go." And he sits there for a minute zoning out, because that magnetism from the eyeballs on the screen and they just can't—whatever. They're zoning out. And if all of a sudden they kind of wake up from their zombie state, and they go, "Oh! Oh, yeah, I'm sorry. I didn't respond right away, but here I go." Maybe their ears start to open, okay. Fine. Done. That's it. See, discipline is not invoked if there's obedience. The reason for discipline, let's put this down, when you don't stop sinning. See? If I tell my kids, "Stop throwing the ball," and they throw it, and then they go, "Oh, I'm—yeah, right, I shouldn't do that. I'm sorry." Then we're done. No need for discipline. Discipline happens when in sin we don't stop. When we're doing something we shouldn't do and we don't stop. When we're not doing what we should do, and God's going, "Come on, set the table, let's go. Stand up, be salt and light in your office. Speak up, let them know you're a Christian." And week after week you don't do it. Then it's what I like to call, "Dad has to get off the couch." Remember that? And what he's doing is getting ready to apply pain. Right? That's the discipline. So star that one.

That's Hebrews 12. God, then, is getting off the couch. My kids sitting there, it's "Come on, set the table, let's go," and they just sit there and they don't do it. And I ask them again. If they

continue in their lack of obedience, that's when it's time for dad to act. Dad has to get off the couch. And the purpose of that, of course, is pain. I mean, that is what God says he will do. Those are the words, and let's just go through them really quickly here. Look at verse 5. He quotes Proverbs 3. He says, "Do not make light of the Lord's discipline." There's one word to describe it. Which, by the way, ends up eight times in this passage. I know in English you'll count nine, but there's eight occurrences of it in the Greek text here. Eight times, he repeats this. And that's a lot of times for one little passage of Scripture. And the word is the word that is used of a dad having to do something that's unpleasant to correct a child. Discipline.

The next word, he says, "And do not lose heart when he"—this is not a positive word; circle that one. What's the word?—"rebuke." I'm going to get in your face about what you're doing wrong. Right? That's the feeling of rebuke, and that's the word. I'm in your face about doing the wrong thing. I'm showing your fault, I'm making it clear. "Because the Lord disciplines"—there's the second occurrence of it—"those he loves. And he"—here's the third word to circle, which I already made you circle, and that's the word 'punish.' To spank. Corporal punishment. It's the word to actually, in the analogy here, dad applying the back of his hand or the shabet, the Hebrew word, the stick, to the rear end of the child. It's a paddling. It's a whipping, if you will.

And then it says this in verse 7, here's another word to describe this, "endure hardship." Now, if you've got your Greek New Testaments, you Greek students out there, you'll see there's just one word here, and it's a familiar word to us. It's the word hupomone. Remember that? Hupomone. And here it's not hupomone under the pressures of temptation. Here it is that we have to endure the discipline of our father, see? And the word hardship is not there. They're supplying that word in our English text for the word hupomone. We have to bear up because it's difficult, it's unpleasant. And speaking of that, drop down to verse 11. The next new descriptive word for this is a negative. No discipline seems pleasant. And that's the word kara, the word 'joy' or 'gladness.' Whatever it is, it's the opposite of that. When God disciplines us, it takes away our gladness. It takes away our joy. And the next word, I mean if that's not clear enough here comes the antonym for it. It says it's painful. It hurts. That Greek word is colorful, too. It's grievous. It's affliction. It's a word sometimes translated 'suffering.' It hurts us.

So those are the words: discipline, rebuke, punishes, endure, hardship, not pleasant, painful. That's a list of things that you can start to—I hope now—include issues and the things in your life that you're all of a sudden going, "Oh, I get it." See, because it's not like you're lying in bed and then all of a sudden your rear end starts to hurt. "Oh, God must be disciplining me." Right? That's an analogy. But it is circumstances that fit the description. And the description is one of pain. That's why we defined it: God applies pain. And if you want some examples of this, and we won't take time to turn all of these, but you might want to jot a few of these down.

Here's an example. How about this one: 1 Corinthians 11. 1 Corinthians 11:30, the context is discipline. God is loving his church and his people, and because they will not stop sinning, he says, "Some among you are weak, some are sick, and some have even fallen asleep," which is a euphemism for death. But let's start with the first two. In that context, we're talking about physical problems. So if you want to kind of categorize some of the pain that me may inflict, and I know you have no room there to do it, but if you write really microscopically small, put this one down: health problems. That's one thing that God uses according to Scripture to apply pain to our lives to get us to stop sinning. Sometimes in our lives from a sore throat to cancer, just across the board, the whole spectrum of physical health problems, he can use those to say, "Hey, I'm trying to get you to stop sinning." And by the way, that's the goal. To get you to stop sinning. And according to that verse, if you don't, the last piece of discipline is "some among you sleep." More on that in a minute.

Let me give you a couple others. How about Haggai 1. Haggai 1:9. Here's another whole category of pain in adult Christian lives that is sometimes defined as discipline. The context here, discipline. And here's what he says. He says, "You bring home money from your work, and I blow

it away. You take money and you put it in your purse, and it's though you're putting it in a purse with holes in it." So the first one's health problems. Let's call the next one "money problems." Do those hurt? Oh, yeah. No? Just me? They hurt you, too. Yeah. They hurt. You ever had money problems? Bible says sometimes, those money problems can be God's discipline.

And as long as we're in Haggai 1, jot down Haggai 1:6. Because in Haggai 1:6, it says, "You eat and you're not satisfied. You put on clothes but you're not warm." Let's just put this one down: a sense of a general dissatisfaction. That sense of, 'just something's not right.' It's akin to what David said in Psalm 32. It's like every day, it's like I'm sapped with the fever heat of summer. I'm just not content. And let's call that one emotional pain.

Okay. We've got health problems, we got money problems, we got emotional problems, we got general dissatisfaction in our lives. We could go on and on through the Scriptures, but that's enough to let you know anything that will qualify for the concept of not pleasant but painful, suffering, affliction, is something we can define as a possible arsenal that God pulls off the shelf and says, "I'm going to apply this to my child to correct them." And the goal, as I said, let's jot this one down, is for you to stop sinning. That's the goal. And if you don't stop, here's the deal. Let me just put it this way. Here's a blanket statement. If you are a child of God, God will get you—if you're on a particular a path of sin, the sin that so easily entangles you—he will get you to stop. Okay? He will. He will get you to stop. Because the last step of discipline, as I said there in 1 Corinthians 11:30, is death. Does that sound weird, and harsh? I know it is from our perspective, but God will even take your life. Which for us of course we understand; there's another room to this whole thing. Dad gets off the couch, if he can't get you to stop he'll take you into the next room where you're going to live for eternity anyway. But he's going to get you to stop sinning. That is what's he's going to do. And I know it's battles in this area, and then it's battles in that area, and then it's a—I'm not talking about Wesleyanism or perfectionism. I'm just talking about the fact that if you continue in a particular sin, God is going to get you to stop it, one way or another. And he will use discipline to get it done, and the ultimate tool in his arsenal is to take your life from this planet. And that's a whole 'nother sermon, but we need to know that's part of this goal. He's going to get you to stop.

And that's verse 10. Are you still in Hebrews 12? So what's the purpose? "It's for our good that we may share in his holiness." That's the whole point. He wants to get you to stop. It says in verse 11 that we can have this harvest of righteousness. That's the goal. Discipline is to get you to stop sinning which, again, could be a positive or negative in terms of getting you to do something you should be doing, or to get you to stop doing you shouldn't be doing. So it works both ways.

Now. If we stop—jot this one down—God's response: he forgives. And I put that in quotations because I know some of you are sensitive to this concept. And some of you are sensitive to the concept of God forgiving a Christian because you have a wrong perspective of how God operates. We view God as kind of like the locker in junior high. He's a combination lock or something. Or he's a computer program, or he's some sequence, some equation. He's a person. You realize that, right? And even though you are forgiven forensically and legally the moment you become a Christian—right? Are you not forgiven for sins past, present, and future when you become a Christian? That's total forgiveness. That's legal justification. In the process of sanctification, there is also forgiveness that is granted to you. And that's what I like to call the patching up of our relationship. There may be no penalty, no condemnation. That's why the word "punishment" unfortunately in verse 6 is a bad one because we often think punishment is a payback, a retribution, a quid pro quo; you did this, I'm doing that. That's not what he's doing. He's applying pain to get us to stop. He's not paying us back. That's vindictiveness. That's not what God's doing. What God is doing is applying enough pain until you stop. That's the goal. Because your sins have already been paid for.

This is not Catholicism, you get that, right? This is not Roman Catholicism where we believe that if you die with venial or mortal sin, and you haven't confessed those and those right then you're going to hell, or you're going to purgatory for a number of years. That's not it. That's not the Bible. That's not what the Bible teaches. Justification is the complete forgiveness of sins, that on the cross it was all paid for, to tell us *tetelestai*, paid in full. But, because I'm a Christian dealing with a father who is a person, when I sin, though my sins may be paid for, and they can't be forgiven again on any other level as it relates to that, there is a forgiveness relationally that needs to take place, right? I mean, it's as though my kid, he breaks the neighbor's window. And now I'm not going to try to punish him to pay him back or make him mow the lawn so he can make up enough money to pay back the window because his older brother has already paid it back. Are you tracking this analogy? Right? Jesus paid for our sins. It's all paid for. But I can guarantee you, if my younger son breaks the window even though the older son has paid for it, and he's not willing to confess it, there's a problem here, right? We've still got to solve the relational problem even though the window's been paid for. Your sins have been paid for. But just as Scripture said, and I think this is the context of 1 John 1:9, that "if we confess our sins, speaking out as Christians, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What kind of forgiveness is that? It's the restoration of our fellowship.

Now I know forensically and legally we have fellowship with God, no matter what, because we are his children. But the issue of relationship, patching up the relationship, that needs to happen. That's why you need to come to God and get it right. And when you do, and you stop, and you forsake your sin, you know this: God forgives. We sin, God grieves. You don't stop, he gets off the couch. You stop, then he forgives. He's ready to restore. What's the end result? The whole point of this series. And this is, you become more sanctified. The point is, verse 10, "to share in his holiness." The point is to be trained by this process so that my life yields a harvest of righteousness. He wants you to be more godly. And the process of going through discipline gets you to increasing godliness. And that's the goal.

So it's an important part of the Christian life. So much so that if you don't experience it, or you don't know this is a reality, you have reason to question your Christianity. It has to be a part of your life. And we'll see about identifying it here in a second. Because here's the problem. If you've listened to what I've said so far and that's all I've listened to, you'll say, "Wow, you know, every time I have something go wrong in my life, it must be discipline." You know, "I got a sore throat. God must be spanking me for something." Okay, that's not it. "I had a money problem, I lost my job; it must be God's discipline." Don't get into that, okay? You need to consider other possibilities.

Because there are others. And now this is the real crux of the sermon this morning. You have to be able to discern when it's discipline and when it's not. That's critical. Because if I tell my kid—think about this—"Hey, kid, go take out the trash."

"Ugh, I'm being punished!"

Right? No you're not. Just take out the trash.

"Go do your homework. Come on, son, do your homework."

"Ugh, I must be being punished!"

No, you're not. You got to do your homework. There are other reasons for unpleasant experiences in the Christian life. And it's not necessarily discipline. So don't get to that place, because that will really mess up your relationship with God if every time you have an ache or pain you think, "Oh, God, you're disciplining me." He may be, but we need to sort it out. So there are other reasons. What do I got? Five pointy fingers there? There are other biblical reasons you may be incurring suffering—let's just use the categories. Health problems, money problems, emotional problems. You may have all kinds of issues that aren't related to discipline but we need to sort them

out. And if you get the buckets clear in your mind, we can figure this out and have some discernment.

Let's start with the first one. It could be, according to verse 3 in our passage, the context, it could be the world's opposition. Look back to verse 3 once you write that down. "We need to consider him"—this is Hebrews 12:3—"who endured such opposition from sinful men." Now did that cause pain in Christ's life? Absolutely. That caused a lot of pain in Christ's life. Was it because he was being disciplined by his father for doing something wrong and he didn't stop sinning, so God had to bring this into his life? No. That was just because he was the light in a dark world, and because of that he incurred the hatred of sinful men. And like we saw last week, God promised that in your life, too. If you're going to be salt and light, you're going to incur some difficult—you may lose your job and have monetary problems because you're standing up for what's right. That could be a reality. Is that suffering? Yes, it's suffering, but it's not discipline. It's just the opposition of the world because of your commitment to follow Christ. That's one big category that we need to recognize. And so if we can clearly make the connection there and rule out the other, we can say, "Okay. It's not discipline, but I'm still hurting."

Secondly, it could be sin's consequences. Now that's not directly in this passage, but it's all over the Scripture. For instance, you might want to put it down this way because you'll remember the passage. It's in Galatians 6:7. Galatians 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked . . . man will reap whatever he sows." Or to put it in maybe more colorful language, Hosea 10. Hosea 10:12-13. He says, you guys, "if you sow righteousness you will reap the fruit of unfailing love." It'll be great. He says, "But the problem with you, Israel," Hosea said, "is that you planted wickedness, and you're reaping evil. You are now having to eat," he says, "the fruit of your deception. You did something wrong, and you're having to pay that back." There are consequences, residual consequences, that have nothing to do with God's discipline because—follow me now—you can do something wrong that carries consequences with it, and you can confess it and get right with God and those consequences will continue. Right?

I was watching the news this week, The National News, and they had a video of the guy ripping off the 7-11 down here in South County. Did you watch that? Ski mask, gun, and it said he's already hit Lake Forest, he's hit all these places. Let's say that's you for just a minute, okay? Could be you, right? And somebody hears, that's you. Let's say that's you. You're ripping off the 7-11. And you come here to church and this morning I'm preaching to you, and I'm your pastor, maybe you're one of our Sunday school teachers, I don't know. And you feel convicted. And so you come up to me and say, "You know, Pastor Mike, you're right. I'm the guy, I've been ripping off 7-11s, you saw my gun and that was my ski mask, and it's bad and I'm wrong, and I want to get right with God." And so I say, "Okay, that'll only take a minute. Okay? Come on, let's talk to God." And we talk to God, you confess your sin, you repent, you're right with God, and I say, "Fantastic. Now? See, now, Dale's going to drive you down to the sheriff's department." "Well, wait a minute, I thought I was forgiven." "Yeah, you're forgiven, but you got to deal with the consequences." Dale's going to do it, because I'm going to go to lunch. Right? Uh, because I'm hungry. Dale had a snack. So, Dale's going to take him down there. And Dale's going to turn him in, and then we're going to say, "Hey, we'll see you on Tuesday in your jumpsuit, and we'll come visit and do Bible study. Okay?" You're going to pay for the penalty and the consequences of your sin.

Now, as you sit in jail tonight—because this could be you—as you sit in jail tonight, think about this. Can you sing hymns to God and be in fellowship with him? Absolutely. Can you be in harmony with God? Sure you can. Because you're forgiven. There's restoration. Look at our equation. You stopped sinning. You're not holding up 7-11s anymore. But you probably aren't going to get Ruth's Chris for dinner, right? You're not going to get a baked potato just the way you like it. You're going to be eating the slop in the county jail, waiting for trial. That's what's going to happen to you. Now, it's a problem, but it's just the consequence of sin.

Now this has another category, by the way, because some of you are philosophical, theological thinkers. I know there's a broader aspect to this. It could be, not just the personal consequences of your sin, it could be the broader global consequences of sin, and I get that, too. In other words, you are going incur suffering in the world because we're all a part of the human race that is all under the condemnation of Genesis 3. It's called the curse. And because of the curse, for instance, one of the parts of the curse is your body's going to die. Now let's think that through for a second. Everybody in nursing homes, and in car accidents, and in hospital rooms that die today in Orange County, think about this. It's not because they did some sin today, right? And they're suffering the consequences of their sin. No, there are people in nursing homes that are dying this afternoon because of Genesis 3, the broader consequences of sin. The general consequences of sin. You may have a sore throat because God has cursed the elements of the world, and you are subject to the rebellion of germs in your body. So that's part of it. It could just be that. I'm sick just 'cause I'm sick. Right? And that's part of the sinful consequences of the world. May have nothing to do with God's discipline. You tracking me with that? So we've got big categories here, okay?

Thirdly. Now let's talk about when God is doing it specifically and personally. God could specifically and personally bring pain into your life because he is testing you. That doesn't sound good. We've moved now from the analogy of a father to a teacher, and the teacher is applying a test to see if you'll pass the test, okay? Give you an example. Let's turn to this one. 1 Peter 1. Let's turn to 1 Peter 1. Very explicit, a clear statement about the fact that God may bring suffering into your life. Personally, he doesn't allow it, he's bringing it into your life for a very specific reason, and it's to test you, to test the reality or the genuineness of your faith. That may sound odd, but let's see if we can make sense of it.

Let's start in verse 6, and as you glance down to verse 6 in 1 Peter 1, be sure and pick up a few of the verbs there and the adjectives in verses 3, 4, and 5. Because it's a great description of our salvation and that's where the demonstrative pronoun points back to. It says "in this." In what? "In this incredible salvation that we have that is protected by God, it's reserved in heaven for us, it's all because of the work of Christ. In this you greatly rejoice. Though now, for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Now those are three big words: grief, suffer, and trials. And the key word here is the last one, trials. Grief and suffering comes because it is a test. That's what the word means. It is a test. And the Bible says here, you may have had to suffer that. Here's the reason, verse 7: "These have come so that"—purpose clause, here it comes—"that your faith"—now skip the dashes for just a second; skip the parenthetical phrases and go to the bottom of the sentence. "These have come so that your faith may be proved genuine."

Okay? Let's just take that thought in. And the point is this: sometimes suffering comes to your life so that your faith, your apparent trust in God, can be revealed to be real and true. Now let's read it all. "These have come," it says, "so that your faith—of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, because real faith is like real gold. It's always going to come through the fire—it may be proved genuine and may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." Now is God scratching his head wondering if your faith is real? Nah. He's got that figured out, okay? He wants to prove that to you and to everybody around you. It's much like—and you can put in the margin maybe—the parable of the seed and the sower. Remember that? There are four soils there, and the soils, they're all, though it's not explicitly stated, but they're tested. The first one doesn't need to be tested because he rejects the word. But the ones in the middle that embrace the word, they go through testing, and those two are proved in the middle, soils two and three, to be false because they fail the test. They don't bear fruit and they bail out. The riches, or persecution because of the word comes into their life and Jesus says they fail. It's not real. There's a lot of phony Christians, and when they're faith is tested, they're proved to be phony because they bail out. "They went out from us because they were not really of us. If they would have been of us they would have remained with us." Translation: they would have passed the test.

They would have gone through the fire that God brings into their lives still trusting in Jesus and showing that their faith in God is genuine. That's a reality.

And if you're a brand new Christian, sorry. Here's the news. You're going to have to go through that. And God usually puts you through that really soon in your Christian life. If you've been a Christian for a year or two, it's coming, right? If it hasn't happened already, he's going to put you through some suffering, some trials, to show to you and the rest of the world that your faith in Christ is not a fad, it's not the 4H Club, it's not the Girl Scouts; that you're really a genuine, adopted child of God, and suffering proves that. That could be the reason you're sick. That could be the reason that the doctor said you have cancer. That could be the reason that you lost your job. That could be the reason that your checks are bouncing. Okay? Because you are going through a trial to see, is this real to you? Or is this just some Sunday School Club that you're in? That's the testing of your faith.

Could be the world's opposition. It could be sin's consequences. It could be that your faith is being tested personally and specifically by God. Or, it could be fourthly, that God is training you. He's training you. You know, that's a little different. The analogy is not that God is a parent, and it's not that God is a teacher. Here the picture is that God is a coach. He's the trainer. Now, the coach, if you remember, if you were in athletics in high school or junior high, or in college, you know the coach causes lots of pain in your life. Does he not? Oooh, right? Why does he cause all that pain in your life? Because the big game's coming on Friday. Season's coming. You got to get ready. He causes pain in your life, not to test you. Hopefully you already made the team. You're on the team and it's clear, and everybody knows; you got your jersey. The reality though is, he needs to get you ready for the big plays on the weekend. He has to train you, and the pain of the training—and we get a lot of these words from Scripture, like 'gymnasium'; comes from a Greek word that is used in this context. He's going to put us through the *gymnazo*, the gymnasium experience so that we're ready to bear fruit in the test. Not that he tests you for real, but in the trials, the fire of the world. He may have great things planned for us.

Give you an example. How about Paul's thorn in the flesh? Think about that one. Did that hurt? Is that suffering? Oh, yeah, that's suffering. I don't want that. Right? And Paul didn't want it either, and he prayed, "God, remove this thorn of the flesh." This is 2 Corinthians, right? Remove the thorn. And God said, "No, no, no, no." Why? Because this is going to be helpful for you as you go out. You've been entrusted so much, you're on the world stage, you're writing half of the New Testament. This is going to be a humbling thing for you, and it's going to keep your feet on the ground. We're putting these ankle weights on your life so that your feet will stay on the ground. So that you're not going to be inflated with pride. So the suffering's there. What for? It's like a coach training his player to be able to face the challenge.

It's like this. Here another passage you might want to jot down: John 15:1-2. It's like the vine and the branches. When the branch bears fruit, the father—this is the word we get from cathartic—he cleanses us, he prunes us, he strips back stuff on the branch so that it will bear even more fruit. And the point is, it's not to prove that you're real, it's not discipline, it's that he's trying to get you ready for bearing more fruit. So suffering, cancer, could be in your life because God is getting you ready for an even greater ministry. You may have financial problems, relational problems, emotional problems—things may be going wrong in your life right now because he's getting you ready for something great. As Spurgeon said, he doesn't use—and maybe this is not an absolute statement—but he doesn't use anybody greatly until he hurts them deeply. And there's a reality to that. I mean, no one really is going to go out there and be the great quarterback on the weekend team unless he's gone through a lot of struggle in the gym and in practice. And that's the reality of the Christian life. So the suffering you're going through, could be that, right? Could be the world's opposition, could be sin's consequences, could be God's testing, could be God's training. There's four choices.

Here's the fifth. It could be discipline. And that's Hebrews 13. Same thing, financial problems, health problems, relational problems, general dissatisfaction, whatever. That could be God's discipline. That's might be what happening to you. God is discipline you. And that's the whole point of Hebrews 13. It feels the same, but it needs to be defined differently. You have to discern it differently. And that's the challenge.

"How do I that, Pastor Mike?"

I'm so glad you asked me that question. That's the perfect question to ask. Now. How do you know the difference? Here's the answer. A-S-K. Just jot those down. Ask. You just got to ask. Ask. Because when I'm spanking my kid, and he says, "Dad, why're you doing this to me?" Right? I don't ever say, "Ah, I don't want to tell you." Never say that. I never say, "Well, maybe I just want to be mysterious about it." I want to sit him down and say, "Here's exactly why I'm doing this to you. You need to see that what you're doing over here is wrong, and if you keep on going you're going to be dealing with even worse consequences than Dad. I need you to know why you're being discipline right now." I need my kids to know that. And that is the most concerning thing that a father has on his mind when there's discipline in the family. He wants the kid to know the problem. There has to be clarity about it. And if you ask, here's the deal, God is going to make that clear. Unless, of course, you're not a Christian. Because if you're not a Christian, you know, who knows what you might think. But if you're a Christian and you ask that question, there is a resource in your life called the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit—here's how he's defined—as someone who is sent to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. And as it relates to his children, that's a bit part of what he's doing. He's convicting us of sin, and when he's grieved he wants to let us know. And the Holy Spirit is going to be sure in our lives to point that out.

But we got to ask the question. And here's a great way to ask it: Psalm 139. Psalm 139: 23-24, and it's on your worksheet on the back. It'll be a discussion question this week; you know it will be. And that is that you and I need to get into the practice of praying this prayer, and here it is: "Search me, O God, know my heart. Test me and know my thoughts. See God if there is any offensive way in me." That's a great prayer to pray, especially when your health is in jeopardy, your money's having problems, your relationships are on the rocks. God, what's going on here? That's the question you need to ask.

And by the way, when you're asking it, here's the key: make sure you're willing to receive the answer. Because that's a big problem people have. They ask, but they don't listen for the answer. Let me give you an example of this. Go to 1 Samuel: 4. 1 Samuel 4. What a great example of the right question and really, just a bungling of the whole answer. They didn't get it. They didn't have the right response after they asked the question. To bungle. Bungling. I'll have to look that up. Now the NIV splits verse 1 in half and gives you a title for this chapter. What's it called? The Philistines do what? Capture the Ark. What's the Ark? What's an ark? It's a box, okay, that's what an ark is. A box. Noah had one, a big one for animals. Right? Israel had one in the middle of their worship center that was gilded with gold and it was a box that they kept the tablets of the Ark of the Ten Commandments on. They kept a jar of manna. They kept the rod of Aaron that budded miraculously. That was all in the box. Add some pictures of the angels on the top. They carried it with poles, or at least they were supposed to. And that didn't always happen, but it was supposed to happen and God disciplined them when they didn't. That was an important centerpiece of the worship of Israel.

Now. They go out and they get in a fight with the Philistines, and they're always getting in fights with the Philistines, right? And Philistines are messing with the Israelites. And it says here, look at verse 3. Here's the question they ask: "When the soldiers return to camp"—right? They've just been routed by the Philistines—"the elders of Israel ask, 'Why did Yahweh bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines?' " That's the right question. That is the right question to ask. And put in the margin, by the way, Jeremiah 7 and Psalm 78. Both of those, by the way, answer the

question. The reason they initially were defeated by the Philistines in 1 Samuel was because they were involved in idolatry and compromise. And God let them lose to the Philistines.

Now that's the right question, and had they pondered that on their face before God, had the Holy Spirit done his work in their camp, which I'm sure he would have had he been given the opportunity, they would have been convicted of their idolatry and their compromise. But they didn't give time for that. Look at the rest of verse 3. No contemplation, no pondering. They said, "Oh, I know what'll fix this. Let's bring the Ark of the Lord's Covenant from Shiloh that it may go out with us and save us from the hand of our enemy. Let's go get the holy box. We'll take that out. God wouldn't let us lose with the holy box." Now back to the title of the chapter. Do they lose? Yeah. They even take the holy box. The Philistines capture the Ark! Why? Because it wasn't about the Ark. It was about their sin. They asked the right question, but they didn't listen for the answer.

Do you want a parallel passage to this? Go to the first part of Joshua. Joshua loses at Ai. Remember that little city Ai before they went to Jericho? And he falls on his face after the defeat, and he asks, "God, why did you let us fail?" Right question. Guess what Joshua did. He lingered long enough with God to get the answer. And the answer was there's compromise in the camp. People are in sin and that needs to be fixed. And if you fix it, we'll go on. And here's the problem with a lot of us. We lose a client at work. Our income goes down. We have problems selling our house. We got an issue with our health. We've got issues in our relationships, something happens, and we go, "God, why did you let this happen?" Right question. Just don't let it be some kind of expletive or some kind of rhetorical question. It's a real question. Ask it. God, why did you let me get sick? God, why isn't our house selling? God, why is it that I lost my job? God, why is it that I'm having problems here in my life? Why is it that these checks are bouncing? Why is it that at the end of the month I don't have enough money? Why? See, ask those questions. And if you ask on your face before God with an open Bible and the Holy Spirit in your life, he is going to answer the question. And you will have it. And God will start to draw lines between the points of your pain and your sin. And he will draw the line.

Unless of course it's one of the other things here. It could be the world's opposition, sin's consequences, God's testing, God's training. But if it's discipline, ask the question and wait for the answer. And if ask sincerely there's nothing God your Father wants more than to point it out if you're being spanked. So I got to start with the Bible. I know it at the bottom, but it's the first question we need to ask: is it discipline? I'm sick. I got a migraine. I got a problem. God, is this pain in my life a result of my own sin, and is it your parental, loving correction in my life? If it is, I got to figure it out. I need to know it.

Well, what if I determine it is? What if I start to feel the pang of conviction, and I know it is? Great question. Number three on your outline. What you need to do, is you need to respond biblically. And the first thing I want you to do is to thank God. And I know that's counter-intuitive, but our passage started this way: "It is a word of encouragement addressed to you as sons." Why is it encouraging? Because if we have it, we know we're really his children. If you're not having the discipline of God in your life. If you can never connect the dots between financial problems and your sin. If you can never connect the dot between a health problem and your rebelling or compromise. If you can never see the connection between relational problems and some kind of cowardice in your life, and you don't stand up for doing what's right and God is causing that pain to point out that sin. And they're not always perfectly related, you realize. If you don't see that, the Bible says you're not even a child. It's a very strong word. Illegitimate child, see? You're not even a real child of God. And I've said this many times before, but my dad never spanked the next door neighbor's kids. He may have wanted to a few times, but he didn't do it. They weren't his, see? And if you don't have this in your life, you're not a child of God. If you do have it, why don't you stop and maturely say, "Hey, that's a good thing."

As a matter of fact, look back at our passage, Hebrews 12. It says in verse 9. "Moreover, we had human fathers who disciplined us"—and look at this now, and in maturity from adulthood I hope we can say this—"and we respected them for it." I mean, and I hope that's the whole point of this. It's an encouragement to us because we respect and love our father that he cares enough for us to discipline us.

Now I know, unfortunately, I'm preaching to a culture that is mixed with a lot of really dysfunctional families. And it's really a frustration, because a lot of my peers grew up without their parents ever disciplining them. That was all the craze, right, in the sixties and seventies. Maybe they were just too high to know how to discipline their kids, I don't know. Sorry. But for a lot of them, it was the philosophy. Let 'em color on the walls. Never correct them. You don't want to punish them because that, you know, that'll teach them violence and all that. Nonsense about not disciplining our kids. Which, by the way, the Bible says if you don't discipline your kid, you hate your kid. You realize that? If you don't apply pain to your kid's life to correct him from doing wrong, you hate your child and you become a willing part in his death. Because if you don't discipline him, God's going to have to take care of him and his paddle a lot bigger and more painful than yours. Okay? So we got to discipline our kids.

My point was this. I know a lot of us didn't grow up with that, and therefore we can only you know, kind of extrapolate in our minds what it must be like, and because it hurts we think it's negative. But I hope that some of you are here like I am, having been raised by good, godly, disciplinarian parents, and we can say, "You know what? It was the best thing I could ever have." The parameters of love in my home by the discipline of parents, it's security. It's the best thing you can have. And here's the deal. If you're a Christian, that's the kind of father you have. And your heavenly father will not let you get away with sin. And that's a good thing. And I know it's hard, but let's try and maturely say, "Thanks, God. We want to be glad that we're really loved that much, that you love us enough to correct us on our path." Now that's not bumper sticker, Orange County theology, because that kind of theology says "God loves us, he lets us to do whatever. It's called grace. Graaace, graaace, Goooood's graaace." Right? I understand grace. But grace is not—I just thought I'd sing for you—grace is not a license to sin. Is that right? It's not a license to sin. Grace is something that instructs us to deny ungodliness, Paul wrote to Timothy. So the point is this. I know that may not be your experience, and you may have been taught something different, but this is the God that we have. Our God believes in spanking. Our God does spank his children. And when you experience it, I hope you can have the maturity at some point in your Christian life to be thankful for that very fact. So thank God you're his child. That would be a good thing. You're a true son if you experience this.

Number two, you've got to clearly identify the sin. The whole point of this is getting us to share in his holiness which means that when I'm getting spanked I know exactly what the sin is. And we said this. Dad wants to tell us what our sin is. He wants to reveal it to us. Be, though, very careful in going to figure it out. And I know this is a really, you know, a lot of points on this outline, but let me give you three sub points to this. None of these will have sub points thankfully. I don't think.

Here we go. First one. Here's the deal. When you're identifying the sin, know this. It could be something that is a violation of Scripture, but doesn't violate your conscience. Okay? It violates the Scripture but it doesn't violate your conscience. God will get off of the couch for things that don't even violate your conscience. 1 Corinthians 4:4. "My conscience is clear," Paul said, "but that doesn't make me innocent. It's the Lord who judges me." Now I know that's a judicial analogy, but let's picture a parental analogy. You know, I know my conscience is clear, but it doesn't make me innocent before God, uh, because the Lord is my disciplinarian. He's my dad and he will punish me. And by that I mean he will chastise me, he will spank me based on his rules. Therefore, if the Bible says, "Don't look at a woman lustfully," and I'm doing it but I don't feel any conscience about it,

and you know, everybody does it, that's just the way I think, well here's the deal. God will get off the couch for that if you keep doing it, even if you're not convicted in your conscience by it. The Bible says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth." But you at work, you talk like everybody else, because you know, just kind of fit in, that's what I grew up with and so, you know, I let those things roll out. And the Bible says don't do it. He will get off the couch for that if you don't stop. It doesn't matter if you don't feel convicted about it or not. The Bible says let there not even be a hint of immorality among you. You may not even be convicted by it because we live in such a sexualized culture, but if that hint of immorality is in your life, God the Father will get off the couch and discipline you if you don't stop. You may not feel the conviction, it doesn't mean God isn't going to hold us accountable as a holy father disciplining and correcting his kids.

Secondly. Let's invert that. He will also get off the couch if you violate your conscience, even though there's not a verse on it. He will get off the couch and discipline you if you keep violating your conscience on an issue even though you can't turn to chapter and verse. It may be how you dress. Pick on that one for a second. And there's no verse about, you know, how long your skirt needs to be, or you know, your collar or your blouse. It may not be in here, right? You can't look it up. "Oh, here it is. It's the two-inch rule over the kneecap." Whatever. Can't find that. But in your conscience you keep looking in the mirror going, "I don't know. I don't feel right about it, but you know what? Everybody else does it, that's the way they dress, I'm just gonna do it." If you violate your conscience, even though you can't find chapter and verse on that specific issue, God will discipline you. He'll do it. If it's a purchase. There's no verse that says, "Thou shalt not buy an RV." Right? That's not in there. But if you and your wife are struggling in a conscience. Your conscience is violated because of that purchase. Doesn't matter if other people can do it. Doesn't matter that it's not a problem for someone else. If it's a conscience problem, a violation of your conscience for you, see, the Bible says God is going to discipline you for that if you don't respect your conscience in that.

And that's not, you know, 1 Opinions 12:2. That comes from Romans 14. Jot this down. Romans 14:22-23. And the context here is what Paul calls "disputable matters." People coming out of Judaism with kosher upbringing, and now people are offering them non-kosher hotdogs. Here, have a ham sandwich. And they were struggling in their conscience. And even though they were perfectly okay to buy an RV or perfectly okay to eat a ham sandwich, the Bible says if you violate your conscience in it, it's sin. I mean, the last line in that whole chapter is, "and everything that does come from faith is sin." If your conscience is condemning you, it's wrong. I don't care what other people do. And I don't care if you can't find a verse on it. If it's convicting your conscience, God will get off the couch for that if you don't respect your conscience.

It could be a violation of Scripture that doesn't violate your conscience. It could be a violation of your conscience that can't be found in Scripture. Thirdly, it could be the subtlety of idolatry. The subtlety of idolatry. And this a verse we don't quote quite enough. You'll never find it on a Day Spring card. But it's Exodus 34:14. This is an important verse. In speaking of the rivals in our hearts of idolatry, it says don't do it because our "God, Yahweh, whose name is jealous, is a jealous God." And again, that is seen as a human weakness so people don't like to see God as jealous because that seems like he's not, you know, totally confident in himself. That's not the point. It is a perfectly holy and righteous attribute. He is God and should be God in your life. And if you love your children more than you love God, God whose name is jealous is a jealous God. Be careful, he'll get off the couch for that. Okay? You tracking with this? If I love my job more than I love pursuing Christ, then you know what? Our God whose name is jealous, he's a jealous God. He'll get off the couch for that if you don't stop. If you love that, that goal that you have, that retirement goal that I'm gonna do. If you love that goal in your life more than you love the God who redeemed you. If that really is your ultimate supreme love, God will get off the couch and deal

with that if you don't stop. Make God the God of your life. And I add that one because it's subtle. The subtlety of idolatry. It's easy to miss that.

If it's God's correction, respond biblically. Thank him. I know that hard and very mature to do, but do that. ID the sin, and don't be confused. If you feel that conscience issue, and even if you don't find a verse. If you don't find the conscience issue, remember I told you to go into the prayer closet with your Bible and the Holy Spirit. You need both of those. And just remember subtlety. Secret idolatry. Something in my heart that no one ever sees. It could be an issue of God bringing pain into my life because he wants to correct me.

Now what do I do? This should seem simple, but let's state it clearly. If I'm going to share in his holiness and respond to correction as I ought to, a son responds to a father's discipline by changing his relationship to the sin. Two words for that in the Bible. Confession and repentance. I need to confess my sin, and I need repent of my sin. Confess and repent. Confess and repent. Let's think that through. Confess. Two-parter. I said there wouldn't be sub-points. Here's some more sub-points.

To confess. You know this word. We talk about it all the time. I'm sorry if this is old news for you. Compound Greek word: *homologia*. Homo, the same. Logia, to speak. I'm speaking the same thing. If the Bible says, don't let any unwholesome word proceed out of your mouth because it's detestable to God, then I'm sharing the same opinion that God has about it and I'm willing to say it's wrong. I agree with you God, it's sin. Confession. If we confess ours sins, by the way, he's faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We start with that. We agree with God.

Repentance is a turning on my sin. 2 Corinthians 7 is a great passage about this. I'm turning my back on the sin, and I'm saying if God hates it, I want to learn to hate it. I'll agree with God here that it's wrong, but now I want to turn my life away from it. Metanoia. I want to turn on it. Turn against it. I want my heart, as 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 say, I want to have that indignation toward it. I want my heart to be filled with sorrow over it. Repentance is not just sorrow, but it's the turning caused by the sorrow. Godly sorrow brings repentance. 2 Corinthians 7:5. And by the way, here's sub-sub-sub-sub-point, okay? Ah, no excuses. God hates that, doesn't he? No excuses. We like to confess sometimes, "But you know, well, I really couldn't help it," or "You know, I was trying and my motives were good." A-done with all that. Don't be like Saul standing before Samuel with the bleeding sheep in the background when he should have taken care of Agag and his entire possessions, and he's coming back trying to say, "Well, you know, maybe I can sacrifice a few of these and it'll be a great offering. I'll put it in the offering plate." And remember that famous line from Samuel at that point? To obey is better than sacrifice. Whatever your excuses, and that's the highest rationalization, right? The reason I didn't obey is I want to serve God better. Right? And God says, "No, that doesn't make any sense. It would be much better if you just obey me. The sacrifices you need to give me. The offering that will be great is an obedient son. And an obedient daughter."

So no excuses, no rationalizations, no justification, just agreement and turning from sin. And if we do, the Bible says he's faithful and righteous to forgive our sin and that's where some people, that's the last little stone people trip over. So let's jot that one down and let's knead it out from this passage. We need to understand that the last responsibility I have, after the spanking, is not to cross my arms and doubt the forgiveness of my father. I need to embrace his forgiveness. And some of us struggle with that, right? I mean, we repent of our sins because we just got spanked and there's tears in our eyes and Dad goes, and we're like, "Ahhh, I don't know, I don't really believe it. I don't know."

That's—you've got to believe that God is a God who does what he says. You would offend me if you didn't believe what I said and I kept telling you over and over and over. If I said, "I transferred a hundred thousand dollars into your account, this morning while you were on your way

to church"—that would be a stretch, um, because I don't have that. But let's just say I did. And you said, "Aw, I don't believe it." "No really, believe it." "No, I don't believe it." "No, really, I did it. I did it this morning." Eventually you would call me integrity into questions if you don't believe what I said. And here's what the Bible says. If you confess your sins he's faithful and righteous to forgive your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

"Well, I don't—I don't really feel worthy." Stop with that! Matter of fact, let's go back to where we started: the broken bones of Psalm 51. Let's look at this in closing. Psalm 51. David is talking about the fact that not only has he messed up his life, but in discipline God had to break a few of his bones. And yet, in the midst of his confession and repentance, look at the way he is so ready to believe in God's forgiveness. And that's where some of us struggle. That's the last challenge of this whole process. And let's look at what David says. And look at the superscript on the song: "Director of music. A psalm of David." When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, you got the context here? I mean, he'd messed up royally. And now he's here and he's dealing with God because Nathan had confronted him, and he recognizes as we pointed out before in this series in verse 4, that he realized that he had sinned against God, ultimately. I know he sinned against Bathsheba and her dead husband now, but he says, "You know what, ultimately, it violated you." And then he says, "So you're proved right when you speak and you're justified when you judge." And the spanking that he received for all this? Bottom line, he says, "You were right in doing it. I mean, you're totally right in doing that, God."

Now, drop down to verse 7. He says, "Cleanse me with hyssop." And that was the branch. They'd dip it in blood, it was part of the ceremonial Levitical law in the temple and all that. But it was a picture of forgiveness. He says if you do that, if you provide me forgiveness, if I ask you to cleanse me—look at the next phrase. He says, "Uh, uh, maybe I'll be clean." Is that what it says? Underline the word 'maybe.' Is that what he says? What does he say? I will be clean. I love that about David. Even in his repentance he's totally set on the veracity and truthfulness of God. He anticipates restoration. I will be clean. Wash me and maybe I'll be white again, maybe I'll try to be white again—no. You wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. And then he says, "Let me hear joy in gladness." Here's the broken bone part. He says, "Let the bones that you've crushed"—that was his discipline; you can read more about that in Psalm 32. It says, "Let the bones that you crushed rejoice." I'm ready for that. Hide your face from my sins, blot out all my inequities. Drop down to verse 17. This whole description in Psalm 51 is a guy who is broken over his sin. He's repentant and confessing his sin and he says, "O God, a broken spirit and a contrite and broken heart." He says, "O God, you will not despise that. I know that you accept that." Why? How would he know that? Because God said it. Do you see the faith of David? It's so great. Even in his failure he says, "I believe your word and if you say you forgive me because I confess it and repent, then I am. I'm clean." Now some of us still need to get there.

Think of Jonah. He's a great example. Talk about a spanking, right? Jonah? You saw that one? They haven't made a movie of that yet, but they should. Think about that. He rebels against God's command, he's not doing what God told him to do, so talk about a spanking, I mean, three nights in really bad hotel. Right? It was a bad, bad scene. And he gets vomited up on the shores. And there he is, and do you think he learned his lesson at that point? Do you think there was a little confession? He writes a psalm. I mean, he's not writing the psalm in this big fish, but the Bible says out of that he wrote this psalm. He expresses his heart in Jonah 2 about his brokenness over his rebellion and sin. And he gets it. Like David, he says, "You were right to do this to me." And then he gets barfed up on the shore. Bleeegh, and out he comes. Now as he's still wiping off fish vomit—think of this, right?—and he's there on the shore, here's what chapter 3, verse 1 says in Jonah: "And the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." And guess what he said. "Go to the great city of Nineveh, and give them the message that I give you." God says snap! And then he says, "Now don't use your arm again, okay?" Right? He says, "Now if you've learned your

lesson"—and the greatest words in all of the book of Jonah, here it comes, this is Jonah 3:3—"and Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh." Good idea, right?

That's the picture, though. The picture is of a God who gives grace and not only says, "You're forgiven. Now, sit in your bed, time out." Right? That's not how God operates. God is not into time outs. Right? God is into disciplining children, repenting and forsaking sin, and then hitting you on the rear end again to push you back in the game. John 21, right? "Oh, I'm just going to go fish," Peter says, "I'm such a failure." And Jesus said, "Get out there and feed my sheep. I love you. You love me, feed my sheep." Here's the same deal for you and I. Are you willing to believe in the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, and once you recognize that the pain in your life is because of God's discipline, are you willing to forsake and repent? And if you are, embrace his forgiveness and get back in the game. That's what God is looking for. God is a loving father and he doesn't want you to be overwhelmed with your grief or sorrow, he wants to use the conviction and sorrow of your life to bring you to repentance, and then repentance to put you right back in the game. Let's not doubt the grace of God.

Let's pray. God, help us. As people in this world that are tempted by sin, sometimes when our conscience sees it, sometimes when it doesn't. So many idols beckoning us to love them more than you. And God, in our hearts we want to see the sin, when you bring pain into our lives especially. We'd like to see it even before that, but sometimes in the stubbornness of our fallen humanity, our flesh, sometimes we engage in sin longer than we should. And it's something that gets you off the couch and then you have to apply an illness, a money problem, a relational problem, some dissatisfaction, or you have to bring something into our lives to get us to wake up. God, I pray that we wouldn't be like those Israelites in 1 Samuel 4 who ask the question and don't listen for the answer. Help us to bring our Bible and our heart in submission to the Holy Spirit, into the kitchen breakfast nook, into the closet of our house, into our study, and to say, "God, point it out. I'm ready to listen." And when you reveal that sin, and you make it clear to us, "Here's why I'm doing it—you're not standing up for Christ at work; you're saying things you shouldn't say, you're thinking thoughts you shouldn't think, you're doing things I told you not to do." I pray we be quick to repent, that we recognize that that pain is helpful and motivating us to do the right thing. And then, God, when we do, like Jonah let us just embrace the grace of God and get about our task. And let's try and do it with a little better attitude than Jonah ended up doing it with. Let us say we're going to serve you even when it's hard. We're going to obey you, we're going to do the right thing, and we want to do it with a heart that, like a son that recognizes that the love a father it is enveloped in the parameters and in the protection and the security of our father. Thanks that you love us that much, that you love us enough to correct us. God, thanks so much for this reminder from Hebrews 12. It's been a great analogy, it strikes home to us, and I pray, God, it would be a great reminder the next time we run into something that is hurtful, that we might be able to sort it out quickly, and that in our time with you that if there's sin in our lives that we would be quick to respond. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.